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## **Armadillos Causing Concern in Lawns**

“Something is digging up areas of my lawn and flower beds and I can’t find the cause.” This is a common question these days, and the culprits are armadillos.

Armadillos, known by several other less flattering names, such as “hard shelled ‘possums,” are just doing what comes naturally. More than 90 percent of their diet is made up of food that is found in the ground.

The extended drought that we are experiencing has caused armadillos to migrate to well maintained lawns and landscapes. Here, because moist soil is available, they can dig more easily and find insects, earthworms, spiders, scorpions and other invertebrates that make up their diet.

### **More Armadillo Facts:**

- An armadillo is easy to identify. It is 12 to 18 inches long and weighs between 5 and 15 pounds. The color is slate gray or brownish-black, and its body is covered with a shell made of horny plates joined by horny skin. It has a long pointed nose, large ears and small eyes.
- The armadillo’s range currently covers most of the southeast and includes southern Alabama, Georgia and most of Florida. It is relatively new to our region, having expanded its range from Texas early in the 1900s.
- Reproduction is very interesting in that only one litter is produced each year and it always includes four identical young of the same sex. The young look like the adults except that they are smaller and their armor coat is soft and leathery and becomes harder with age.
- Food is located by digging silver-dollar sized holes in the landscape. The den site is made up of numerous “hiding” burrows throughout a 2 to 10 acre sized home range. Armadillos are active mostly at night, often very late.

The amount of damage from armadillo foraging varies from one landscape to another. In general, the damage is not as serious as it looks. If the digging can be

tolerated, try waiting until normal rainfall patterns return. Once sufficient soil moisture and food is present in natural areas, many armadillos will migrate out of urban landscapes.

The removal of a problem armadillo is sometimes necessary. This is not a protected species and may be taken year round. Always use caution and follow any local or state laws that may apply before discharging a firearm near your residence.

Exclusion from small areas of extensive damage can be accomplished with fencing. The fence must be of small welded wire and at least 2 feet high. It should be slanted outward at about a forty degree angle and the bottom buried at least 18 inches deep. This method should only be considered where other options are less feasible.

A problem armadillo can often be caught in a live trap. A relatively large cage type trap is recommended for this purpose. One of the best baits can be made by suspending earthworms tied in a piece of hosiery or similar material. Over ripe fruit is also recommended as bait.

More specific information concerning armadillo biology and control can be obtained at your Florida Extension office. Ask for Fact Sheet SS-WEC-76: "Control of Armadillos." Online computer users can download this and other fact sheets at home. The site address is <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

**Question of the Week:** A very large yellow spider has built a web across our porch. Is it poisonous? What should I do?

**Answer:** This is probably a golden silk spider. It is easily identified because of the large size and color. If you will look more closely, you will also see conspicuous tufts of black hairs on her long legs. Males are small, dark brown and often found in a web with the female.

The golden silk spider is beneficial, in that it feeds primarily on flying insects that are caught in its large, strong web. If possible leave the spider and web alone. The arrival of cold weather will end, or reduce, web construction.